

UNMASKED

Becoming a real woman in a fake world



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Happy Fat Kid



Putting Yourself Down

I've decided to dive right into what is probably the hardest mask of mine to face. It's also the one I have been wearing the longest—the “Happy Fat Kid” mask. Yes, I was and I am FAT! Less so in recent months, but I am not on the “plus size” or “curvy” side of the scale yet. I know many of you may find the “F” word offensive, but why sugar coat it? I am overweight, obese, heavy, and yes, fat. I use this word here because that is how the world sees folks like us, and if we are honest with ourselves, it is the word that we use to describe ourselves in our minds—even if we never say it out loud.

I don't remember ever being thin. I have pictures of



a slimmer me, but in my mind I have always been overweight. I became aware that I was different when I started kindergarten, and things got worse when I hit first grade. I went to a small Catholic school, and I was “the fat kid.” Plus, I had to wear uniforms that were definitely not flattering to larger-sized girls. I realized very quickly that I was the topic of many jokes and whispered comments. I would be laughed at as I squeezed in and out of my desk and when I couldn’t do the same stuff on the playground as my classmates. I felt hurt and lonely. At a time when I was supposed to be learning how to interact with others and make friends to last a lifetime, I was shunned. I soon discovered that if I cracked jokes about myself first I could fool myself into thinking the other kids were laughing with me—not at me. Believing the lie might not hurt as much. I thought that if I always acted happy, just maybe they wouldn’t tease me so much. Maybe I’d escape if they couldn’t get a negative reaction out of me. The world has stereotyped us fat people as “Jolly Old St. Nicholas” types, laughing and shaking our bellies like bowls full of jelly. Even at such a young age I figured I might as well be the stereotype and pretend to be happy all the time so other kids would like me. I decided to be super helpful and willing to let people use me in order to have friends. So, on went the “Happy Fat Kid” mask. It has been super glued to my face since I was five years old.

Things got measurably worse as I reached the age when boys and girls discover the wonders of adolescence. Needless to say, I liked boys, but they did not like me. By my freshman year of high school I was one of the only girls in my class who had not had a boyfriend, or at least a date (well, what we called dating at that age). I remember one incident that still hits hard. Each Valentine’s Day the seniors would sell roses for a dollar, and kids could send them to anyone in the school with a note. I had a crush on this one boy, so I was shocked and excited to receive a rose from him. A table of guys in my class watched me get the rose and started

Your Turn...

laughing. My crush hadn't sent it. The rose was a joke, sent by the other guys. I can still see the look of horror on the boy's face when they told him he'd "sent me a rose." I still feel the sting of his words as he made sure he let me know the rose was not from him. I laughed it off and waited to cry until I got home. No way would I let them see me cry. My peers thought I was worthless because of my size, and I believed them. Throughout high school the jokes continued, my self-esteem shrank, and my insecurities grew.

And so it began. I added mask upon mask to hide my feelings, but the mask of the "Happy Fat Kid" is the foundation out of which the others grew. I am not saying that life would have been perfect if I had been thin. We all struggle with issues that can cause us to mask our real feelings—weight, abuse, illness, lack of role models, height, a disfiguring birth mark—the list is endless. I have been talking to people about this idea of masks, and I've found that there always seems one root mask, that first one that all the others rest upon.

Revealing Question:

- Which insecurity or issue in your life defines all the others?

21-Day Challenge:

- What action steps can you take to overcome the habit of wearing the "Happy Fat Kid" mask, i.e. putting yourself down?

What would it feel like to knock that mask off and breathe free? I am just starting to do that, and it is scary. It is not easy by any means, but oh, so worth it. I feel so exposed and open. A friend commented that she was surprised that I would write about this stuff and put it out there for everyone to read. She almost seemed shocked that I would share my personal hurt with the world on the internet and in a book. She thinks this is crazy, and I say, yes, it is crazy! I want to talk about things no one talks about, and if that means I have to expose some of my faults and failures, my innermost thoughts to those who read it, then that is what I am going to do. I recently attended a women's conference where the speaker, Beth Moore, pointed out that "We are never more personally exposed than when we are doing God-empowered exploits." The concept hit me hard. It confirmed for me that sharing my story is part of moving in the right direction.





Where I Go for Help:

- *Beth Moore's So Long, Insecurity really helped me define my root mask.*
- *For recognizing signs of bullying and how to combat it visit <http://www.stopbullying.gov/>*



Unmasked



"Sometimes people carry to such perfection the mask they have assumed that in due course they actually become the person they seem."

~William Somerset Maugham

